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Past Link

Last January 27 the government brought suit against the Philadelphia firm of McCloskey & Co., contractors for a \$10-million Veterans Administration hospital in Boston. The facility had been built in 1950. Subsequently, portions of the outside walls collapsed. By 1964 the government had invested more than \$4 million in repairs, which money it asked the court to recover.

In its surface, the McCloskey case looked to be just another equity proceeding against just another faulty contractor. But closer inspection showed this case to be different. There were, for example, one or two barely discernible traces of some link between Matthew H. McCloskey Jr., head of the Philadelphia company, and Robert G. Baker, former secretary to the Senate's Democratic Majority and close confidant of former Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson.

SHORTLY after the government brought its suit against McCloskey, we wondered aloud whether there were actually some connection between the two. A witness in the Baker probe, we recalled, had testified that McCloskey paid Bobby Baker a \$4,000 commission after the company landed a stadium contract in the District of Columbia. Could it be, we mused at the time, that some connection existed between Boston, where the walls were falling down, and Washington, where the roof was caving in?

This week Sen. John J. Williams provided an answer, and the roof could be heard to groan and creak again under the strain.

Holding in his hand a

check for \$109,205.60, the Delaware senator explained that McCloskey had paid this amount to cover the cost of a \$73,631 performance bond on the stadium project. Don Reynolds, a Maryland insurance man, got \$10,000 as his commission—plus an odd figure to confuse the auditors. The balance—\$25,000—was turned over to Bobby Baker for use in the 1960 Kennedy-Johnson

IF THIS was, as Senator Williams charges, an attempt to buy favoritism for the construction firm, McCloskey picked up one of the finest bargains of all time. The stadium project, a \$20-million government enterprise, and the VA hospital are only two of the McCloskey's contractual successes. The company also holds the major contract for constructing the mammoth Rayburn Office Building on Capitol Hill, a project of which McCloskey's share totals more than \$60 million. It built a top-secret CIA building in southeast Washington, the cost of which the government refuses to divulge. The contract incidentally, was awarded in the first year of the Kennedy administration without bothering with competitive bids—a procedure that has raised more than one set of eyebrows.

A paltry \$25,000, of course, won't buy that kind of favoritism. It is necessary to examine McCloskey's role in the 1960 campaign. He was, to begin with, the Democratic Party treasurer, and a capable one. But after Mr. Kennedy's election, the Democrats still had \$4.5 million in unpaid bills. McCloskey went to work and quickly erased the deficit. A grateful President appointed him ambassador to Ireland, a post he resigned this year in preparation for the 1964 campaign.

MCCLOSKEY modestly explained his value to the Democratic party this way during an interview last March with a Wall Street Journal reporter: "I've been dealing with these people for years, and I know where all the bodies are buried."

Senator Williams, it is only fair to say, knows the location of a few bodies himself. He applied the heat that first smoked the Boston hospital case into the open and he initiated the Senate's Bobby Baker probe.

But in following these affairs to their sordid conclusion, he will require more than simply an ability to find bodies. He will have to discover where the Senate majority, which whitewashed Bobby Baker and approved Matt McCloskey's ambassadorship, has buried its conscience.—Charleston, S.C. Eve-